

THE BARAMA RIVER CARIBS

527 The guests, attired in their best ornaments, face paint, and raiment, usually arrive shortly after dawn of the first day of the spree. Before it is light someone has started beating rhythms on the sambura, or drum, and playing tunes on a fiddle. During the morning the men and boys gather in one end of the house telling stories and amusing each other with conversation while they drink. They lie about in hammocks smoking, eating, talking, and playing with such musical instruments as may be present (Plate 23, a and b). In the afternoon the dance usually begins and lasts until late in the evening. The dancing takes place in the house or in an open space outside the house.

527 The general rules of etiquette at a drinking spree are as follows.

576 The aged people stay by themselves, it being beneath their dignity and capacity to indulge fully in the sport of the young. Women do not drink with men. The lady of the house, most often the wife of the house owner, serves the drink to the guests in person. Usually a large calabash, holding two or three quarts and hemispherical in shape, is filled from the kanu. In it are floating several small calabashes. The hostess fills one of these smaller calabashes and hands it to each guest. Specially honored guests are presented with the large calabash full of drink at each serving. One must always take the first drink from the calabash which is served to him, but if he does not desire the full contents, it is polite to pass it to someone else who will drink all but a small residue, which the

● [832] original recipient must finish. Sharing one's drink with a woman is a way of showing that one regards her as attractive. It is impolite for anyone but the original recipient of the calabash to return it to the hostess, and he must return it empty.

534 No particular name is applied to the dance which accompanies a spree. (Wano, to dance.) Music is usually supplied by two men who beat samburas, or wooden drums with double heads of akuri skin, (Plates 23, a, and 24, a) and one or more men with fiddles. The latter may be of European design, bought from a shop, or may be made from bamboo stems or congo pumps. Both types

[462] are strung with three cotton threads and played with a yariyarri bow strung with kraua twine. Anyone of the male sex can play the drum or fiddle, although most settlements have certain

535 individuals who are especially proficient. Usually an old woman

527 and several little girls begin the dancing, which is always in line

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sprees children smoke whatever tobacco they can beg from their 867
 elders and drink all that they can. One not infrequently sees
 suckling babies given cassiri by their mothers. Alcohol and tobacco,
 to the Carib mind, like food and drink, are to be enjoyed by all
 human beings, although in largest measure by adults in their prime
 because these latter control the supply.

A wife is theoretically at the orders of her husband. It is sup- 562
 posedly the man who makes the decisions affecting the family. 593
 As in most societies, however, the respective influences of the
 mates upon family policy vary with personalities and circum-
 stances. Matrilocal residence during the first part of married life
 restrains many a young husband's temper and doubtless trains
 husbands to assume a more tolerant attitude than they would if
 outside the wife's village. For a wife who has been mistreated [586]
 appeals to her relatives, and, if they agree with her, the matter
 is taken up by them with the husband. If he persists in mistreating
 her, her kinsmen will eject him from the village. Although matters
 are sometimes composed between the mates, such a forcible ejection
 usually is equivalent to divorce. On the other hand, a wife
 who is habitually lazy and recognized as such by the community
 may be beaten with impunity by her husband. Actually the
 women, generally speaking, exert a good deal of influence upon
 their husbands. A man usually consults with his wife about such
 matters as taking a trip, building a house, working for outsiders,
 acquiring trade goods. As has been described, when a man leaves
 his wife at home while he goes on a journey, he tells her on what
 day he will return, a date which is recorded by a knotted string
 which he gives to her. Each day he is gone she unties one of the
 knots, and if he is not home on the day the string is finally knot-
 less, or at most a few days thereafter, his absence is said to be
 grounds for divorce. A woman in this case returns to her father's [586]
 house and becomes available for another marriage. Consequently,
 men are meticulous about keeping their engagements at home.

Aside from the two grounds of divorce already mentioned there 586
 is parting of company by mutual consent. Although no rule is in 832
 force, in the cases which I investigated the male children stayed
 with their father, and the female children with the mother. A
 plant called wamba may be used as a charm to prevent desertion.
 It is rubbed on any article belonging to the other mate. When

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586 the latter uses the article in question he or she is overcome with
832 desire for the other.

587 A widow always marries her husband's brother or some member of his kin. If she does not, she risks the accusation that she killed her husband for the love of another man. A widower frequently, but not necessarily, marries his wife's sister.

592 The family is therefore composed of a man and his one or more
597 wives and their unmarried children. Each family has its own house

and seldom shares a house with adult individuals other than the spouses and their unmarried children. No case was recorded of an adult male (with the exception of young suitors) occupying a house jointly with another adult male. If several adult women are living in the house they are always found to be wiver or concubines of the man of the household. Children of deceased rela-

[582]tives are, however, often adopted. Practically every individual in the community over the age of about twenty is married or has

[736]definite plans to be married. Universal matrimony thus obviates dependency occasioned by old age as well as loneliness. Children of one or the other of the spouses by previous marriages may be included in the family group. If both parents of young children die, they are usually adopted by the maternal grandparents. The family, composed of spouses and their own and adopted children, is thus coterminous with the household.

595 A man may take additional wives if he can persuade their fathers that he can care for them. There seems to be little objection on the part of the brothers or kinsmen of the first wife, if she is not mistreated. Aside from the type of polygamy in which the several wives live in the same household, several cases were recorded of men who were maintaining two households, each in a separate settlement.

(856) Within the household there exists no formal distinction between children of polygamous or subsequent marriages, and a child's position in the family depends largely upon its personality and age. The same is true of wives in polygamous families.

594 Three means of entrance to the family group are possible: birth, adoption, and marriage. A man is born into a household, and lives there until he is ready to marry, whereupon he establishes a household of his own. The position one occupies in the household group, therefore, depends upon whether the group in question

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784 a plant bina. Tabus which must be observed with plant binas, in
778 addition to those mentioned above applying to all binas, include
secrecy and prevention of the accidental touching or handling of
the plant by a woman, (Accidental touching or handling by another
man does not result in spoilation.) Binas may be given away or
sold, although this is very rarely done on account of the precarious
nature of the results. The bina power may object to being thus
bandied about and produce boils and other ailments for the dis-
comfort of both the giver and the receiver.

755 If a man finds that his bina has spoiled (that is, if he has an ail-
778 ment which he feels may have been caused by an infringement of a
bina tabu), he may be cured by a piaiyen. Alec, my interpreter,
for instance, was once cured for a case of this sort which resulted
in a skin eruption. "First the piaiyen blew tobacco smoke all over
my head and then over my face. He was smoking a cigar of Carib
tobacco. He passed the palm of his hand down over my face while
he was smoking. He sang. The spirit of the krapo bina came to the
piaiyen and told him what was the matter. The piaiyen sang,
asking the spirit of the bina to come out of me. The spirit came
out, I could not see it, but the piaiyen talked to it as it came out.
He only talked and sang to the spirit. He did not suck me or do
anything to me except blow tobacco smoke on me, pass his hand
over my face, and talk and sing to the spirit. He did this three
nights. During three days I could eat no meat. The piaiyen gave
me cassava and birds, mostly mamm and powis, but no other
kinds of game. I paid the piaiyen with two yards of cloth. I got
so I could see better in a few days."

● 832 A number of love charms are in use. Those of which I know are
used only by men, although women also are said to use analogous
charms of love. All are roots bearing an alleged resemblance to
the male sex organs. One is to be mixed with oil and rubbed on
the hair of the suitor. When near the lady he passes his hand
through his hair and manages to touch the lady with it. Another
is surreptitiously mixed with the damsel's face-paint. A third
can be rubbed unmixed on anything which she would be likely
to touch. No unfavorable results of a medical nature are to be
expected from the clumsy or ill-advised use of these charms, al-
though embarrassment and ridicule follow discovery. Failure of
the charm to win the girl's heart is attributed to improper methods

832 of use. Although very good results are reported from the use of certain love charms, only desperately unrequited lovers or individuals with adulterous or home-breaking intentions resort to such extremes. Prolonged coyness or indifference is not a noticeable feature of Carib courtship and before marriage, at least, it is only the extremely unattractive individual who cannot prevail upon the desired one to share a couch occasionally. Sexual communion seems to take the edge off romantic yearning. In short, there is little love of the "moon-calf" variety between Carib young people. A man who wishes to persuade a virtuous wife to leave her husband is the most frequent user of love magic.

754 **Miscellaneous Magical Beliefs and Practices.** The aremi emu, or professional sorcerer, is concerned chiefly in acting as magical agent for individuals who wish either to do harm to another person or to seek revenge. The functions and techniques of this practitioner are described in our chapter on Crime and Punishment because of their close connection with law and order.

754 It is well to point out here, however, that the methods of the
791 aremi differ from those of the piayen in the following respects.
(1) The aremi does not use a maraka or rattle, because he is unable to talk with the spirits which are represented by pieces of stone.
(2) To induce the psychic state necessary for his art, the aremi drinks an infusion of red peppers, while the piayen uses an infusion of green tobacco. (3) The aremi, although able to divine trouble, is unable to talk directly with any of the more powerful spirits as the piayen does, but relies almost entirely upon magical practices. On the other hand, both medicine men and sorcerers use tobacco smoke in their practices.

Herewith are mentioned certain magical practices and beliefs which are within the scope of laymen.

224 The first time a dog is used for hunting, it cannot be allowed
789 to eat the flesh or bones of an animal which it has hunted. If such occurs, the dog will be useless for hunting in the future. It is believed that contact with the animal flesh weakens the dog's powers of hunting. Orupere, a plant called by the name of a giant mythic snake (Myth 3) because the veins in the leaves are red and branch out like the tongues of this supernatural monster, is rubbed on a hunting dog's nose to make his smell keener. It is extremely difficult for any living thing to escape the clutches of